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Ministry of Forests and Range

the Sayward Forest

Past to Present

Acknowledgements

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We would also like to acknowledge Jack Long* for his contribution to the text. Jack started working for the B.C. Forest Service in the mid 1930s as part of the YMFT program. He helped start the Quinsam Nursery in 1939 and the Duncan Forest Nursery in 1945. He worked for the B.C. Forest Service as a nurseryman until his retirement in 1974.

For more information, please contact:

B.C. Ministry of Forests
Forest Practices Branch
Victoria, B.C., V8W 3E7

(250) 387-1191

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Forest Practices Branch

106-0 5781 /

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Introduction

The Sayward is comprised of some 150,000 hectares of forest land located on the east coast of Vancouver Island, northwest of Campbell River. Mountains encircle the forest on the north, east and west, and rivers and streams connect the many lakes that dot the region.

The Sayward forest is a popular recreation area. It is also an intensely managed, second- growth forest. Most of the second-growth timber has grown from hand planted seedlings.

Loggers first entered the Sayward in 1889. The valuable timber and gentle topography of the region provided prime logging opportunities. But the logging practices used at that time left a lot of slash and small-diameter trees behind and, by the early 1900s, this debris was becoming an extreme forest fire hazard.

In the 1920s, initial reforestation research centred on methods of aiding natural regeneration. It was hoped that random blocks of standing green timber would provide enough seed to regenerate the adjacent logged-out areas. Studies began to indicate, however, that natural regeneration would not provide enough new growth to replace the number of trees being logged or lost to forest fires.

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Tree Planting Begins

In 1930, R.L. "Tie" Cobb of the Elk River Timber Company offered the provincial government 450 hectares of forest land in the Sayward region to be used for experimental work in reforestation. The early trials in spacing, seed collection, spot sowing and planting were carried out on this property.

Seventy-five hectares were planted between 1931 and 1934. That plantation is now called the Beaver Lodge Forest Lands and it is a healthy, diverse forest that has been reforested by both natural regeneration and planting.

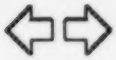
They didn't know how they were going to plant these trees or what sort of a tool they were going to use...

Were they going to use mattocks or were they going to use shovels?...

And how they actually did plant them was that they used shovels and one man dug the hole and the other guy planted the tree.

Jack Long

The depression of the 1930s resulted in widespread unemployment. Two programs were created in B.C. to help alleviate the situation. In 1935, the Young Men's Forestry Training Program was started to train men aged 18 to 25 years to aid in forest development and protection. The Forest Development Projects were started in 1936 to provide work for single, homeless men who had registered for relief. Crews of men from both groups were eventually employed in the Sayward to clear land, re-build roads, fell snags, develop parks and plant trees. The work of tree planting took on a greater significance following the fire of 1938.



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The Great Fire

In 1938, an unprecedented dry spell resulted in one of the worst forest fire seasons ever seen in B.C. The largest fire took place in the Sayward forest. The fire burned for almost 30 days and roughly 35,000 hectares were destroyed.

There was a look-out just out of Elk Falls... And I remember going up there, on the look-out, and you could look almost down to Courtney. Just a sea of snags. There wasn't a green sprig left hardly. 75,000 acres

Jack Long

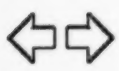
Prior to 1938, only 1,300 hectares of forest had been replanted in British Columbia. Preliminary research into planting had begun, but at the time of the fire, natural regeneration was still relied on as the primary method of reforestation in the province.

The Sayward fire marked a turning point in the development of a reforestation program in British Columbia. Forest officials realized that relying on natural regeneration would not be sufficient to ensure a sustainable supply of timber for future use. To curb the incidence of forest fires, legislation was introduced that made logging companies responsible for the disposal of slash and debris. Stiffer measures were proposed to regulate the amount of timber cut and intensified tree planting projects got under way in the Sayward forest.

It was a very, very hot fire. There was nothing left in the way of seed source.

Jack Long

In the spring of 1939, seven crews of 11 men each plus a foreman planted 410 hectares. A total of 763,550 trees were planted that year. The planters lived in a camp of canvas and board tents and were served hot meals under tarps set up in a field.



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Alternative Service Workers

During the second world war, provisions were made for Mennonites and other conscientious objectors to participate in alternative forms of national service in lieu of military training. In 1942, some of these Alternative Service Workers (ASWs) were made available to the B.C. Forest Service. They were initially trained to help protect B.C. forests from fires many feared would be started by enemy action or sabotage.

Five camps were located in the vicinity of the Sayward forest. At first, the men were housed in tents, but these dwellings were eventually converted to sturdier structures with wooden floors and walls, and canvas roofs. They were paid 50 cents a day and they grew most of their own vegetables on land leased near Courtenay.

Once the main fire season had passed, these men started working at other types of forest protection and improvement work. Tree planting projects got under way in the spring of 1943 and, by the end of the year, 3,800 hectares had been planted in the Sayward forest.

In 1944, most of the ASWs were relocated to other parts of the country before eventually being sent home. It is clear, however, that during the short time they worked in the Sayward, they contributed a great deal towards the regeneration of that forest.

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Post-war Planting

Little labor was available following the war to continue the planting programs. Resources were put towards research and seedling stock was held in the nurseries. As labor again became available, the planting continued. In 1951, 7,542,000 seedlings were planted. By the end of 1954, much of the backlog of unstocked area in the Sayward had been eliminated.

In 1963, through an agreement between the Forest Service and the Attorney-General's office, minimum-security prisoners were placed in two camps in the Sayward forest. Inmates worked on road maintenance, plantation pruning, fire suppression and fire watching, parks building projects, and tree planting.

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Campbell River Nursery Operations

Development of the Campbell River forest nursery, which would later become known as the Quinsam Nursery, began in 1939. The land was ditched, leveled and cultivated in preparation for sowing in the spring of 1940. By 1941 the nursery was fully organized and the goal was to produce four million seedlings a year.

Through the years better equipment was devised. Sombody would get an idea and build something. Then others would take it on and maybe add to it. Everyone was in the picture... It was a matter of evolution

Jack Long

The early years at the Quinsam Nursery were ones of trial and error. There was no electricity, the water system was less than adequate, and there were problems with frost heave and slow germination. Despite this, 3,358,500 seedlings were shipped in 1950 to planting projects in the area. As one of the first seedling nurseries established in British Columbia, the Quinsam Nursery made a significant contribution to the development of current nursery technology.

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Reforestation Today

Much has been learned since the initial attempts at reforestation. Current British Columbia law requires that all provincial public lands be reforested, either through natural regeneration or planting, soon after harvesting.

A biogeoclimatic classification system has been developed that uses climate, soil and vegetation to group ecosystems at regional and local levels. This means that silviculture prescriptions, written before logging occurs, are developed to match the ecosystem being regenerated. The result is higher seedling survival (between 85 and 90 percent) and better growth. The biogeoclimatic factors of each area also help determine which of the 19 different species planted in British Columbia will best suit a particular site. Often, two or three different species are chosen.

Increases in seedling survival can also be attributed to continued research and improvements in seedling nurseries. Light, humidity, temperature and other factors are all carefully controlled to provide optimum conditions for growth.

Researchers are also studying alternatives to conventional clearcutting in order to determine the effects on forest health, productivity, biological diversity and visual aesthetics. This includes the development of techniques to harvest and reforest mixedwood forests while retaining their species diversity and value as habitat for wildlife. The goal is to achieve sustainable forest management.

In British Columbia, more land has been reforested than harvested since 1987. More than 200 million seedlings are planted each year. In 1997, the four billionth tree will be planted. A seedling commemorating this four billionth tree will be planted in Campbell River by the Premier as a tribute to the pioneers of reforestation that began working in the Sayward region following the fire of 1938.

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Sayward Today

The Sayward is one of British Columbia's best examples of a large, successful, second-growth forest. The Campbell River Forest District staff have been instrumental in the progressive management of the Sayward forest. Their hard work has helped to create a valuable, healthy forest that provides for a variety of forest uses.

Substantial investments have and continue to be made to enhance the productivity and value of the second-growth forest and to create employment opportunities. Trails, campsites, educational areas and other recreational features are continually being developed. More than 1,800 hectares have been commercially thinned since 1979 and silviculture treatments are carried out on an ongoing basis. Accomplishments include:

- more than 6 million trees planted;
- 13,200 hectares juvenile spaced since 1974;
- 18,500 hectares fertilized since 1978; and
- more than 2,000 hectares pruned since 1983.

The Sayward forest is an important source of timber for local mills. It also provides important habitat for fish and wildlife. And every year, campers, fishermen, and hunters enjoy the areas many recreational resources. The Sayward has become a shared resource- and a sustainable one.

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